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Espionage Remains the German Problem

Ostpolitik Is at Heart of Vulnerability

By WALTER F. HAHN

Amid the reverberations of the spreading spy scandals in Bonn, a pernicious theme has echoed throughout various parts of the West German political landscape.

The theme holds essentially that espionage activities are after all a "normal" concomitant of modern international relations. As such, the recent disclosures, notwithstanding their seriousness, should not detract from the "higher interests" of West Germany—meaning its relationship with the employer of the uncovered agents, the East Germans. As the liberal weekly, *Die Zeit*, commented on Aug. 30: "As for relations between the two Germanys, they will hopefully continue as they have until now: a painful, if not entirely unsuccessful cultivation of relations including, unfortunately, espionage."

As if to dramatize the point, while his opposition Social Democratic Party was gleefully taking potshots at Chancellor Helmut Kohl over the scandals, SPD Chairman Willy Brandt met with East German leader Erich Honecker. There was double irony in Mr. Brandt's gesture: It was a spy scandal of his own—the unmasking of a close aide, Guenther Guillaume, as a top East German agent—that triggered Mr. Brandt's 1974 resignation as chancellor.

Although the theme has been somewhat muted from the Kohl coalition government, it has still seemed at pains not to direct anger at East Berlin, instead blaming the problem on previous SPD governments. For his part, Mr. Honecker has encouraged the theme: In contrast with past routine, he has failed to crow over the recent defections. Indeed, Mr. Honecker has soothingly referred to "clouds" that often appear over interstate relations but will "in due course disperse again."

Even if one stretches the argument that espionage and other forms of covert action are a "normal" fact of international life, the application of that adjective to the situation in West Germany touches on the bizarre. West Germany has long been known as the most espionage-ridden country on the globe.

The agent invasion of West Germany has come in waves. First to arrive on the scene after World War II were the Soviets. A KGB defector, Peter Deriabin, has detailed how the Soviets took early advantage of returning German prisoners of war and the stockpiles of Nazi records that they captured to set up large-scale operations in West Germany.

The late Reinhard Gehlen, the founder and longtime head of West Germany's Federal Intelligence Service (BND), once wrote "Soviet espionage work in the Federal Republic is practically a sinecure." Mr. Gehlen had good reason for his doleful statement. In the 1960s, one of his staffers was revealed to be a Soviet agent. At the staffer's trial he testified that he had been ordered at one point by his "control" to seek a transfer from the BND section in which he was working: It seems that another agent was already in place there.

But the picture of Soviet and other bloc operatives stumbling over one another in West Germany is nothing compared to the East German presence. No one except they really know how many agents came westward as refugees from East Germany before the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, and how many have been placed or recruited since then. But based on extrapolation from the number of uncovered cases, estimates reach into the thousands.

In the public perception agents are equated simply with spying. However, the stakes and missions have risen much higher.

Particularly in the communist countries' order of covert battle, the new spearheads are the "agents of influence." Beyond specific missions, their overall aim is to infiltrate the body politic of the given nation in order to subvert, to weaken and to influence—to affect not only the policies of the country but the "mind-set" of its society. The priority targets are political parties and the government agencies. The secondary targets include the media, labor unions and other special-interest groups, industry and higher education.

Take the case of the Willner couple,

who recently escaped to East Berlin by way of Spain as the security police were closing in. The initial uproar focused upon Herta-Astrid Willner, who since 1974 had worked as a secretary to Mr. Kohl. The intelligence that she could glean from this position—particularly since 1982 when Mr. Kohl became chancellor—undoubtedly was substantial.

Cause for Charge

It soon became clear, however, that by far the more important of the duo had been Herbert Willner. He was head of the foreign-policy section of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, the think tank of the Free Democratic Party of Foreign Minis-

ter Hans-Dietrich Genscher. From there he could not only transmit invaluable intelligence, but also exert direct influence on foreign-policy issues. Bonn is still trying to determine what this influence might have been. Interestingly enough, after he "fled" from East Germany in the 1950s, Mr. Willner served for a number of years on the editorial staff of *Der Spiegel*, West Germany's most influential news magazine.

The Kohl government may be self-serving in putting much of the blame for the erupting scandal on the "laxity" of previous Social Democratic administrations in Bonn, but there is cause for the charge.

When the Brandt government took power in 1969, it did so with a ready-made and comprehensive plan for revising West German policies in the direction of far-ranging accommodations with the East, particularly East Germany. The main architect of this *Ostpolitik* was Egon Bahr, Mr. Brandt's close adviser who then became the main negotiator for the new policy.

Yet, when they set the new course, the Social Democrats knew that they could not simply impose such a potentially radical policy shift on an unprepared electorate. In order to accomplish this they had to alter, through a concerted campaign in the friendly mass media, the basic premises of the German postwar consensus.

At the very least, this meant painting the totalitarian profiles of the Soviet Union and the other communist regimes in softer colors—an effort that was carried to the point where in the early 1970s the field manuals of the West German army no longer identified the potential enemy. It meant asking for if not moral approbation then at least a moral tolerance of those regimes. It even meant gradually setting "the two superpowers" at a certain equidistance when it came to West German fears.

These themes blended easily in the 1970s with a more general radicalization of German political and intellectual elites—what one German analyst aptly characterized as a "revolution in political norms."

Obviously in this changed environment "agents of influence" not only thrived but their task was basically simplified to one of encouraging these new trends. Indeed, those who had penetrated the SPD—and defectors have testified that the party has long been a central target of infiltration—did not have to go to pains to mask their ideological coloring. What made the "Guil-

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laume affair" so shocking—to Mr. Brandt as well—was not so much the discovery of an agent at that lofty level, but the fact that the East German regime deemed it necessary or even expedient to place an operative so close to a chancellor so congenial to East German interests.

Eating With the Devil

The Kohl government's continuation of the basic thrust of *Ostpolitik* (albeit with stronger accents on NATO and the U.S. relationship) reflects not only the abiding foreign-policy stewardship of Mr. Genscher, but more meaningfully the fact that the government is still largely captive to the "political norms" inculcated by its predecessors, especially as far as relations with East Germany are concerned. But to what extent is the government also affected by "hidden influence"?

That question is being asked anxiously in Bonn, but one thing seems certain: The larger quandary for the Kohl government will continue until and unless it stages its own "restoration of norms" in the German policy climate—a project that entails both leadership and time, with emphasis on the former. Meanwhile, one can only hope that recent events will at least forcefully remind Bonn policy makers of the adage that if you plan to sit down to eat with the devil, you had better bring a long spoon.

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